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Court challenge to crucifix in Polish parliament fails

National Secular Society (10.12.2013) - An MP in Poland has lost a court challenge to the presence of a large crucifix in the country's parliament building.

The crucifix was placed, without consultation, in the session's hall of the parliament in the middle of one night in 1997 by a Catholic MP.

Now members of the small Your Movement party asked that it be removed, but the appeals court on Monday rejected the challenge.

Judge Edyta Jefimko ruled on Monday at the Warsaw court that the crucifix is not just a religious symbol, but also one of "culture and natural identity" in the predominantly Catholic country.

Poland's Prime Minister Donald Tusk said he welcomed the verdict and commented that the debate over separation of church and state — which is gathering momentum in Poland — should not be expressed through "fights over whether the cross should be put up or not."

A secular opposition party, the Palikot Movement has also made attempts to have the cross removed.

In 2010 a large cross was placed outside the presidential palace and became the focus of much controversy and division. It was quietly removed to the president's chapel to stop demonstrations by secularists.

Opponents have now vowed to take the case of the parliamentary crucifix to the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg, claiming that their rights as non-believers are being breached.

Mosque torching draws Kristallnacht comparison by Polish Jews

The Huffington Post (19.10.2013) - The torching of a mosque in Gdansk, Poland has rocked the local community, particularly as the incident occurred weeks before the 75th anniversary of Kristallnacht, or "The Night Of Broken Glass" which was a pogrom against Jews on November 9-10, 1938.

Jewish leaders were quick to point out the "frightening connotations" of the arson in a statement which condemned the attack, reports JTA. "On the eve of the 75th anniversary

of Kristallnacht, during which synagogues were burned in the Free City of Gdansk, the burning of the mosque must bear frightening connotations," the statement said.

Michal Samet, Michal Rucki, and Mieczyslaw Abramowicz wrote, "In the face of this cowardly act of barbarism, Jews of Gdansk cannot stand idly by."

The fire was started on Wednesday morning by individuals who have not yet been identified. The mosque suffered \$16,000 in damages in the attack which coincided with the celebration of Eid al Adha.

The imam of the Gdansk mosque, Hani Hraish, told local media that "It's very unpleasant for us, very harmful. The fire didn't just burn our mosque but our heart and souls too."

The Jewish representatives said, "We express our deep indignation against the attack on the temple and the sadness of the fact that it took place in Gdansk."

Poland's Muslims and Jews have both been affected by a ban on ritual slaughter after lawmakers deemed halal and kosher practices incompatible with animal rights legislation, specifically the Animal Protection Law of 1997.

Polish court rejects motion to remove crucifix from parliament

Reuters (15.01.2013) - A Polish court has rejected a motion calling for the removal of a crucifix from parliament's debating chamber in a case pitting Poland's traditional Catholicism against a younger generation who think the church is too strong.

Warsaw's district court late on Monday argued that since the cross had not been met with any objections in the past it was accepted by most Poles and did not violate their rights.

The crucifix was placed in the chamber one night by two conservative politicians in 1997.

The court also chastised the anti-clerical Palikot's Movement party led by former vodka tycoon Janusz Palikot which brought the court case, accusing it of calling for tolerance yet failing to show acceptance of religious symbols.

The party has tapped Poland's growing secularization to become the country's third-largest political force. It said it would appeal the decision.

"The court failed to show objectivity in its decision," said Andrzej Rozenek, one of the party's parliamentary deputies.

"We will appeal this and then seek to have any unfavorable decision overturned. We are determined, so the path should take us all the way to Strasbourg," he said, referring to the European Court of Human Rights.

Poland's rightist politicians hailed the court's decision, saying it reflected the feelings of most Poles.

"This case was a grotesque joke," said Andrzej Jaworski, a deputy of the opposition Law and Justice party and the head of the party's committee to fight atheism. "It was a part of Palikot's Movement's war against the cross."

Palikot's party includes Poland's first trans-sexual deputy and its only openly gay one and its agenda includes the legalization of marijuana and same-sex partnerships.

When it entered parliament in 2011, Palikot demanded the removal of the wooden cross that hangs above the entrance in the main chamber saying that it violated the Polish constitution and influenced parliamentary decisions.
